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ABSTRACT

The term "differentiated staffing" implies subdividing the traditional role of the teacher into different professional and paraprofessional functions and duties. These duties are then assigned to teachers and staff members according to their strengths, talents, and interests. The literature indicates that the concept of differentiated staffing involves three basic assumptions: that teachers are given opportunities to move up a career ladder; that good teachers can remain in the classroom; and that students will benefit because of increased individualization of instruction. Several plans have been suggested for dividing up both the instructional and non-instructional duties of teachers. Still, the implementation of differentiated staffing requires finding acceptable methods for solving several problems: paying the increased costs, evaluating teachers, providing for participative decision-making, formulating a consensus on educational policy and curriculum for the school or district, defining the required functions and duties, and designating the teachers to perform those functions and duties. (Author/PGD)

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DIFFERENTIATED STAFFING
PROS & CONS

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The diversity of demands placed upon schools and educators in the past few years has grown to a point where an increase in the supply of qualified teaching personnel, as predicted by national surveys, will not by itself insure effective and efficient accomplishment of teaching goals and responsibilities. Because of this many innovations in education have occured. One of these, the concept of differentiated staffing, has been introduced as one possible solution to the dilemma of how to use the talents of educators effectively.

Over the past few years over one-hundred articles, books, and position papers have been written on the topic, this paper will attempt to give an overview of this topic since a comprenhensive treatment is impossible. What exactly is differentiated staffing? Like team teaching most people believe they know what the term means but each person has a different conception based on his/her own experiences. While there are many possible variations the term "differentiated staffing" implies sub-dividing the global role of the teacher into different professional and paraprofessional subroles according to specific functions and duties that need to be performed in the schools and according to particular talents and strengths that are evident within the human resources of any given school community. In other words it implies a restructuring and redevelopment of teaching and non-teaching personnel to utilize individual interests and talents. A survey of the literature indicates three basic assumptions of differentiated staffing: (1) Teachers have opportunities to move on a career ladder; (2) Good teachers can remain in the classroom; (3) More students will benefit due to more specialization for individualizing instruction.

In a sense schools have been differentiating for years, ever since distinctions were made between teacher and principal, and between math teacher and science teacher. However the concept of differentiated staffing goes beyond such distinctions and includes many other factors. It includes the idea of a career ladder for teachers - vertical as well as a horizontal one along subject matter lines, increased decision making responsibilities for teachers, pay scales that go upward of $20,000 and a wider variety of career patterns.

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Historically, promotion of teachers lead them away from the classroom usually into administration. There is very little career incentive for the bright, young teacher who traditionally must accumulate a certain number of years experience and a certain number of credits in order to reach the top of the single salary schedule. Lacking the patience many talanted teachers move out of teaching into other occupations or into administration. Creating a career ladder with increased salaries in measure with increased responsibilities would serve to attract and keep talented teachers. By recognizing individual differences in teachers as well as in students, differentiated staffing attempts to better use the talents and energies of the staff by allowing them to do the things they do well, while not forcing them to perform function ill-suited to their talents. Therefore, by creating more and different kinds of teacher roles, like evaluation specialist, curriculum developer, and diagnostician of learning difficulties, differentiated staffing tries to match functions to be performed with teacher interest, skills and abilities more than do traditional staffing patterns. By recognizing the professional competence of teachers, differentiated staffing incorporates more teacher responsibility in decision making regarding curriculum and instruction, a function previously held by administration.

Staff differentiation recognizes the necessity for changes in scheduling, curriculum, decision making power, and individualization of instruction. In order to best use differentiated staffing the schedule should be flexible enough to allow teachers to meet with students for varying lenghts of time for varying instructional purposes. Also as teacher talent is released, new curriculum offerings can be made to take advantage of teacher interest and ability.

There are a number of school districts that have implemented differentiated staffing plans of various types, including districts in California, Florida, Arizona and Missouri. The oldest and perhaps most well known operation is the Temple City, California Plan. Its teaching staff is divided into four professional levels: associate teacher, staff teacher, senior teacher, and master teacher. The specific functions to be performed at each level are carefully defined, and teachers are selected to perform these functions on the basis of their competencies. The associate teacher is conceived of as a novice to the profession and their teaching responsibilities are less demanding.

The staff teacher carries a full teaching load but is relieved of most non professional tasks such as recess duty, grading papers, hall supervision. The staff teacher is an experienced, probably tenured teacher. The senior teacher is an expert in a subject, discipline or skill area. The master teacher is a scholar/research specialist, someone with the technical expertise to apply relevant research into classroom practice. All teachers function as classroom teachers, though not for the entire day.

How can instruction be differentiated yet achieve staff differentation? What implications must administrators be aware of prior to moving into differential patterns of job placement? In response to the first question, Robert M. Gagne has suggested six broad teaching functions: writing learning objectives; decisions concerning the nature of knowledge to be learned (curriculum); motivation; arranging conditions for learning (environment) arranging for transferability of what is learned; and assesment (evaluation).

In each of the above categories, all teachers would be working directly with pupils. Fenwick English (1971) proposed another way of differentiating instruction. His considerations are "modes of instruction" employed by the teacher: tutoring (one to one); lecturing (large group); reciting; group discussion (seminar); laboratory work; inquiry methods; curriculum packets; and using technological aides. According to English, "A complete model would be one in which the staff had selected a number of possible combinations from the above list and used them to differentiate instruction."

What benefits can be attributed to differential staffing?

1. Differentiated teaching assignments should provide for more effective education by fostering good teaching techniques such as (a) flexible scheduling (b) modular scheduling, (c) matching of instructional resources with learner needs, (d) individualized learning experiences, (e) a clinical approach to meeting students needs.

2. It provides for more effective use of human resources by (a) recognizing individual differences among teachers; (b) allowing classroom teachers to assume responsibility and initiative in measure with their interests, talents and abilities; (c) provides a climate where teachers can identify personal strengths and weaknesses and develop new areas of competence and interest.

3. Has a built in training ladder recognizing the necessity for continuous professional development spanning preservice training and running through career - long development.
4. Provides more choice by teachers of the roles they might take
5. Involves the teacher in decision making on curriculum planning, teaching methods, utilization of time, and development of relevant inservice education programs
6. Establishes a climate that fosters creative involvement of staff and greater opportunity for learners
7. Creates a team approach to education, which is based on the concept that development, implementation, and evaluation of the total educational program are the ongoing responsibility of the total professional staff and that this responsibility includes participating in the initial selection, continuing evaluation, retention, and assignment of other team members.
8. Provides the opportunity for interaction among teachers and all other involved persons
9. Has little or no additional cost effect over the traditional system

But all these good ideas ran smack into a series of problems. The change from the self-contained classroom with each teacher working alone to a team effort with teachers performing a variety of roles together and singly was too drastic. It challenged tradition too much . It generated fear, there were too many uncertainties. And so differentiated staffing as a national movement has stalled. An unpublished report on differentiated staffing prepared by the U.S. Office of Education stated "Differentiated staffing appears to be going the way of ecology, team teaching, and the hippie movement. It is being assimilated into nonexistence. In the process of becoming acceptable to the American people it has been watered down and compromised until the popular form has lost the promise of earlier rationale."

Critics of differentiated staffing plans point out that such arrangements will result in proposed increase costs to which the public is not likely to be amenable. They also suggested that increased conflict in authority and an unhealthy competition among teachers will result in an inefficient administration of authority and a destruction of the "esprit de corps" among teachers. They also claim that the problems of coordinating and evaluating teams of teachers and supporting personnel would be unmanageable. Teacher organizations smelled merit pay in the relationships between competence, responsibility and salary. Superintendents saw decentralization of power, more complicated personnel problems, greater involvement of the public, and othergroups to differentiated staffing too much to take. Other reasons it has never caught on and is still not practiced much today is that (1) it is very difficult to distinguish various teacher roles, (2) teachers don't shake off old ways of doing things very easily - particulary when new ways are not known (3) roles can't be predicted and they can't be devised without considering the purposes and settings in which they are to be used (4) there is the error of devising staffing patterns without claer notions about the kind of school to be created. Unless the purposes of the school are clear, developing curriculum and organizing a staffing pattern becomes pretty much of a guessing game.

Often plans or movements get stalled because only part of a problem has been considered. The effort to develop new staffing patterns in schools was conceived too narrowly. The lull in progress on staffing patterns should be balanced against the vigorous efforts underway to explore teacher performance, competency-based teacher education, and teacher renewal centers. Also related are projects on performance contracting, discussions of voucher systems, and probings on the relationship between good teaching and student learning. The alternate school concept also fits into this discussion. The issue is not whether teaching roles can or should be differentiated. Almost certainly education can be improved through differentiation of roles. The issue is rather, discovering how staff ulilization can be better approached amid the problems that cause resistance. To do this there are certain problem that must be overcome.

1. The public must be convinced that more must be spent on education if it is to stand a chance of competing in quality with the automobile or housing.
2. The public sees better education in terms of better student achievement. Standarized tests are not adequate , particularly in comprehensiveness, to provide satisfactory measures of student learning. Better measuring devices must be developed.
3. Teacher organizations are demanding more of a part in decision making. They will not approve and support changes unless teachers are involved.
4. Traditional concepts must be challenged. Teachers, parents and administrators must challenge what they do and what they accept if staffing roles are to change.
5. School organization must become more democratic.

The differentaited staffing movement has succeeded in shaking some thinking. It is too soon to judge whether the balance sheet for change and improvement will register more progress than failure. For the immediate future, efforts on staffing patterns will continue. Differentiated staffing and the broader question of curriculum reform probably won't move much or very fast until the teachers or students decide there is something they want or don't want badly enough. Then it will move - perhaps in a new direction.

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